

an archival impulse

28 May – 24 June 2011

Plimsoll Gallery

Tasmanian School of Art

University of Tasmania

Brook Andrew • Gerrard Dixon

Ross Gibson & Kate Richards • Susan Hiller

Vid Ingelevics • Jacob Leary • Nancy Mauro-Flude

Milan Milojevic • Elisabeth Redmond • Claudia Terstappen

An archival impulse has been inspired by Hal Foster's 2004 essay of the same title. The curators selected the work of ten artists who use both public and private archival material to explore themes that include history, memory, truth, identity, hybridity and the everyday. While these artists use a diverse range of media and approaches, including photography, printmaking, digital media and installation, collectively their work reflects a deep sense of longing for connection with the archival material that forms the basis of their practice.

Curated by Brigita Ozolins, Ruth Frost and Elisabeth Redmond.

A longing for connection

by brigita ozolins

Hal Foster identifies the presence of a distinct archival impulse in contemporary art and argues that the way a number of artists have used historical material in recent years reflects a desire 'to connect what cannot be connected'.¹ He argues that this impulse is underscored, not by a typically postmodern sense of trauma about the past, but by an almost utopian longing to 'recoup failed visions in art, literature and everyday life...'² Foster suggests that the archival impulse is a sign of positive reengagement with history, but he also argues that the impulse is driven by a paranoia about a perceived failure in cultural memory.³

So what is an archive? In its most basic form, it is a collection or repository. It can consist of images, documents, artefacts, paraphernalia, oral recordings and digital files. While a private archive is the storehouse of individual memory, and individual idiosyncrasy, the public archive is the collective memory of a society, described by Calin Dan and Josif Kiraly as the very embodiment of cultural heritage.⁴ Without the public archive, we suffer a collective amnesia, reinforcing Foster's idea that the archival impulse is driven by a paranoid desire to fill the gaps within cultural memory. The power inherent in the public archive is exemplified by the extraordinary efforts undertaken to restore thousands and thousands of records that were shredded by the Stasi, the secret police of the former Eastern Germany, when the Berlin wall came down.

It is important to emphasize that the archive, be it a private or public collection, is not, in itself history, but the point from which history, and its retelling emerges. Each time we return to the archive, the potential for a re-narration of the past becomes possible and thus also the potential for the self and the world. As such, it is also underpinned by a Fosteresque utopian anxiety.

In the exhibition, the most overt reference to the traditional idea of an archive is evident in Brook Andrew's *8 months of war*, 2009/2011, a collection of cardboard storage boxes that contain photos, newspaper cuttings, books, written records, wreaths and other bits and pieces. This is literally a repository of Andrew's interactive installation at Detached Gallery, Hobart in 2009, which invited the public to construct an archive about individual and shared experiences of conflict. Visitors used red string and pins to make physical as well as conceptual connections about food, children, war, extinction, the west, love and religion. They also lit candles and made wreaths. In this archived version of the work, we are invited to imagine the connections that were created in the original *8 months of war* and to reinterpret the remnants of that extended public interaction.

The desire to find meaning through creating new narratives about existing archival material is hauntingly explored in *Spirit*

Patrol, 2011, a collaboration between Ross Gibson and Kate Richards. This newly developed video work uses text, sound and a vast archive of crime scene images, shot between the 1940s and 60s in Sydney, to reanimate a lost history. The details of the original context of the crime scene archives have been destroyed or misplaced, but Gibson and Richards have provided us with the opportunity to explore new narrative possibilities for these elusive yet pregnant images.

Gerrard Dixon is also haunted by the past. His evocative series of historical black and white photographs reflect his desire to bring new life into collections of lost and discarded imagery. Reproduced at many times their original size, the physical degradation of each image becomes both a mask and a portal into the world occupied by these ladies, gentlemen and children of the late 19th century. Dixon speaks of how the personalities captured in these portraits almost hover in his peripheral vision, as if literally stirred to life through the process of rephotographing.

Elisabeth Redmond, on the other hand, is captivated by a more recent and more personal past – that of her own family. She has recreated a section of her living room, activated by super 8 film taken by her parents in the 1950s and 60s. The film is accompanied by Redmond's mother's voice recalling the memories of raising a family in the unfamiliar landscape

of suburban Australia. Simultaneously, a series of slides offers a window into everyday life back in the Netherlands. Redmond's archive offers a faded, but powerfully nostalgic glimpse of a family life that spans two different nations.

Using photography, text and digital projection, Nancy Mauro-Flude takes us to Haiti where she calls up the rituals and paraphernalia of Voodoo⁵ tradition. She lists her archive: 'talismanic gadgets, bottles of oil, sequins, wands, charms, items that are disposed to healing, auguries, tokens for predictions, occult gizmo's, bits and bobs, lace, teapots, petals, leaves, crystals, incense, jars of herbs, lights, dolls, herbs, amulets, spells...'⁶ a shopping list of everyday objects imbued with the potential to transform and to heal. What makes this work all the more moving is the knowledge that it was made before the 2010 earthquake that devastated the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince.

Jacob Leary has been creating an archive from the most mundane of everyday objects, including drinking straws, plastic cups, paper, playing cards, old books and bits of blu-tac. But in Leary's world, the logical sense of order that we normally associate with archival practice is collapsed. Dissatisfied with established systems of making sense of the interconnections between things, Leary recodes and reclassifies, creating strange, rhizomatic structures that network across the most unlikely of materials.

Vid Ingelevics, a Canadian artist of Latvian heritage, addresses the complexities of individual versus society in his two precisely resolved time-based works. *Attention: Mr. Inglewick* is a collection of letters sent to his father that record an extraordinary number of misspellings of his surname - a highly personal archive, overlaid with humour, but underscored by a poignant reflection on attitudes towards cultural difference. The second work, *Souvenir*, is both public and private, documenting millions of fragments of the former Berlin Wall, now in the possession of as many individuals dispersed across the globe. These remnants of the physical boundary between capitalism and communism flash briefly and rapidly against an expansive black void, like asteroids in outer-space. For Ingelevics the wall is still in existence, but in atomized form.

Ideas about identity and cultural diversity also underlie the intensely coloured and fantastical prints of Milan Milojevic. A first generation Australian of German/Serbian parents, he is driven by a desire to create fictional narratives that symbolise the richness and diversity of his cross-cultural heritage. He draws inspiration from an extraordinary archive of 18th and 19th century prints and wallpapers, creating beautifully complex, hybrid environments that reflect the world as a constantly shifting diaspora.

The bizarre diversity of the natural world is also the subject of Claudia Terstappen's larger than life photographs of archived insects, lizards and birds in Berlin's Museum of Natural History. Terstappen says she was overwhelmed by the sheer number of creatures that had been collected and archived since the foundation of the museum in 1810.⁷ The photographs reveal the obsessive-compulsive 19th century western fascination for collecting, sorting, labelling and archiving - a means, not only for gaining knowledge about the world, but also for trying to control and contain it.

Finally, Susan Hiller's interactive, web-based work transports us into the world of dreams. By selecting from one of six different languages and clicking across the screen, we move through a vast palette of intense monochromatic colours that provide the backdrop to a series of hypnotic narratives and rhythmic sounds. Voice layers over voice, and pulse-like sounds fade in and out, evoking a dream-like state. This seemingly simple archive is a complex web of references to psychoanalysis, anthropology, minimalism, colour theory, fiction, science and film. It is an archive of the mind.

All of the artists in this exhibition reference the archive or archival strategies in their very varied practices. While the themes and ideas they are concerned with may be divergent, ranging from memory and identity, to hybridity and the everyday, their work reflects a shared longing to find a new

point of connection with the archival materials that form the basis of their practice. Within those archives, be they public, private, random or highly organised, are endless possibilities for re-narration of their content - and thus endless potential for the creation of new meaning. Meaning itself then, becomes a network of incompleteness.⁸

Dr Brigita Ozolins is an artist and a Lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art.

¹Foster, H 'An Archival Impulse', in Merewether, C (ed) *Documents of contemporary art: the archive*. London: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006, p 145

²Ibid, p 146

³Ibid

⁴Dan, C and Kiraly, J, 'subREAL: politics of cultural heritage' in Merewether, C (ed) *Documents of contemporary art: the archive*. London: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006, p 113

⁵Vodou is the Haitian Creole spelling of the term.

⁶Mauro-Flude, Nancy, *Artist Statement*, 2011

⁷Terstappen, Claudia, *Artist statement*, 2011

⁸The idea that meaning is a network of incompleteness is explored in depth in my PhD thesis: Ozolins, Brigita, *Searching for the subject: new narratives through installation*. (PhD thesis) Hobart: University of Tasmania, 2004, p145



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8 Months of War, (archived) 2009

Mixed media; dimensions variable

'8 Months Of War: A Public Archive at DETACHED, a heritage listed building in the centre of Hobart, was an interactive work in progress where the public were invited to collaborate with the artist by either dropping into the space with news clippings, letters, personal stories and reflections or by sending email and faxes to build up an archive of connections exploring the nature of conflict in the world.

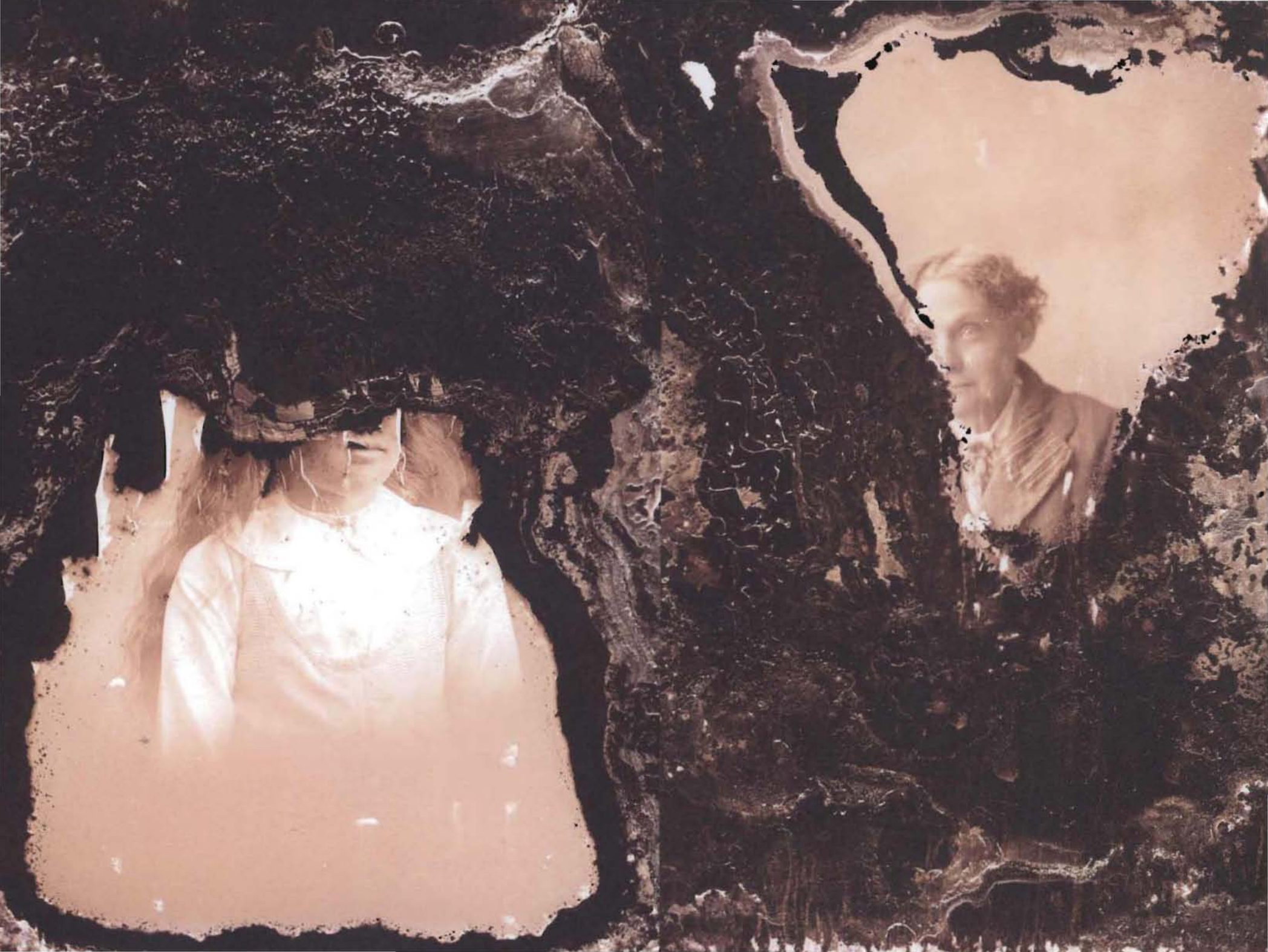
Displayed in vitrines or press boards, red string joined particular related materials together creating a sculptural map of diverse opinions on such topics as invasion, extinction, rites of passage, personal histories and violence. For example, History Wars in Australia and abroad, front line reports from USA, Iraq and Afghanistan about the war on terror, Sri Lanka and the Tamil people, Guantanamo Bay, tabloid race politics, out-dated historical cultural perceptions, species extinction and environmental war.

At the end of each month, a new section of the *8 Months Of War: A Public Archive* was begun and the previous month's accumulation/interactions stored. Using the formal devices and effects of collage, the reading, writing, reception and experiences of histories are at the heart of this work.'

8 Months of War, installation views, 2009

Detached Gallery, Hobart

www.detached.com.au/exhibition_8month.html



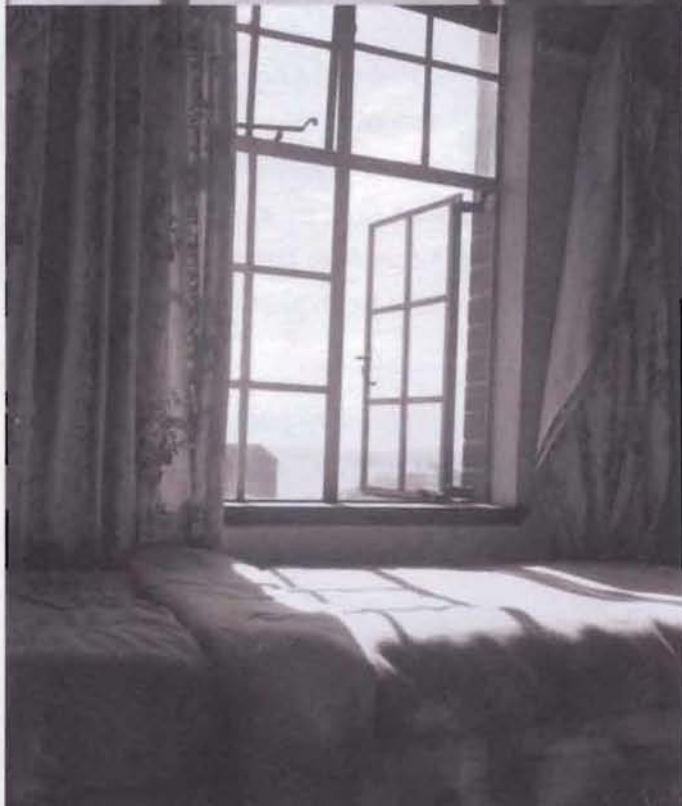
Unknown deceased 1-5, 2011

Inkjet prints; each 115 x 85cm

My current photographic interest deals with lost, discarded photographs and ephemera. I see in my manner of collecting these objects a coming together of paths. The objects could be anything from a negative, to a print, a personal hand written letter, or a bank note or receipt, creased and torn, subject to the happenstance of the moment. I consider the memory associated with such objects and their condition to be both portraits and portals into another expression and time.

The photographs in this exhibition were created in the early part of the last century. The women are unknown and the degradation that has occurred to them is a symptom of their storage. To me, the manner in which the past and the now intercept, the provocation of nostalgia and memory, bring forth an unknown personality – a fragmented ghost, a store of memories I recognize somewhere at the edge of my perception.

From the series, *Unknown deceased 1-5*, 2011



ross gibson & kate richards

Spirit patrol, 2011

Single channel video with stereo sound; 6' (approx.)

visual design, Aaron Seymour; sound design, Greg White

Based on Gibson's original discovery and research into a huge archive of police scene-of-crime images shot in Sydney and housed at the Historic Houses Trust of NSW, *Life After Wartime* focuses on the period between 1945 and 1960. The *Life After Wartime* suite includes live performance (*Life After Wartime, live with The Necks* at Sydney Opera House in 2003); a museum exhibition (*Crime Scene*, at the Justice and Police Museum 1999 and extensively toured); a CD-ROM *Life After Wartime*, (2004 and shown in various national and international exhibitions) and *Bystander*, a 5-channel interactive and immersive environment (2007 The Performance Space, 2009 Justice and Police Museum). In 2009 Gibson published *The Summer Exercises*, a novel based on the archive. All the multimedia projects in *Life After Wartime* play on the absence of factual information about the crimes represented in the archive – using various interactivity and generative techniques, audiences are able to create their own poetic narratives and experiences to account for the events, the characters and the crimes. *Spirit Patrol* is a new, linear video work using entire sequences of crime images, plus texts and music to evoke a period of intense cultural change and personal disruption.

Images courtesy of the Historic Houses Trust, NSW

the book menu

about Dream Screens



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Map of Dream Screens and List of Colors

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Books and websites on dream

reenter Dream Screens

To create a Dream Screens book, please print the five documents located in the folder "artistbook"

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Dream Screens, 1996

Interactive video work for the internet; dimensions variable

'*Dream Screens* is a work designed specifically to trap the wandering imagination of late night Web surfers. This is a complex work, which draws on a number of discourses, including those of painting, psychoanalysis and popular cinema. The user enters through a web-shaped colour palette where she can then choose to click into one of a large range of colour field. At the same time, she can choose from a selection of languages and listen to short narrations, like recollected dreams, interspersed with pulsar signals and heartbeats –the juxtaposition of near and far. The model is the labyrinthine game of infinite couplings and flows, the shift from structure (the finite) to the event (the indefinite), which is the nature of cyberspace itself.'

Dream Screens, installation view, 1996
Dia Center for the Arts, New York

Jean Fisher, 2000
For more information see: awp.diaart.org/hiller



Attention: Mr. Inglewick, 2004

Video on dvd; 13' 50" (looped)

Souvenir, 2011

Video on dvd; 1' 07" (looped)

The two video works that are being presented here, *Attention: Mr. Inglewick* and *Souvenir*, produce two kinds of archives – one actual and one symbolic.

Attention: Mr. Inglewick is a more personal archive composed of letters, each featuring yet another misspelling of his name. These were sent to my father during the years from approximately the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. At this time, as a postwar East European immigrant, he was struggling to rise into middle-management in a business environment not particularly friendly to "foreigners". He collected these letters but never disclosed this to anyone. They were found after he passed away in 2001.

Souvenir presents a different kind of archive in that it takes something that is beyond representation – the untold millions of fragments of the former Berlin Wall – and compresses them into a form that suggests that unfathomable abundance. The premise of this piece is that the Berlin Wall was, in fact, not destroyed in 1989 but, instead, atomized and spread throughout the world. My interest in this form of the Wall is in the recontextualization of the Wall through the alteration of its form, the passage of time and its displacement in space.

Souvenir, video still, 2011

Stories in the Archive

by ruth frost

In Stephen Poliakoff's seminal film, 'Shooting the Past', we are introduced to a collection of photographs that must surely epitomize our notion of 'archive' albeit in an overstated, romantic fashion. The Fallon Photo Library and Collection is comprised of images spanning nearly one hundred years of human activity and sourced from innumerable contributors. It is accommodated in a large eighteenth century house just outside central London. Lofty ceilings, elegant furniture and a profusion of potted plants set a scene redolent with faded glamour. Inside the archive itself we glide through labyrinthine chambers and passageways laden with box

upon box of photographs and negatives. One can sense that there is a system in place here but it is belied by the sheer physical size of the collection (10 million photographs) and by the seeming lack of organisation. Piles of photographs – possibly the leavings of prior frenetic searches – accumulate and eddy in the corners or are randomly scattered on tables. The order seems tenuous, fragile in the extreme, held together by the sheer will power of the small group of eccentric individuals who work there. Indeed the collection is under actual threat by the new owner of the building (Christopher Anderson) who has other plans for it.

The sense of stilled time is palpable. This is made even more apparent by the seeming lack of connection between the actual expanse of the archive and the mansion it is housed in. There is never a moment when we are led into the archive – where we physically pass from the rooms of the house through a doorway into the collection. We simply materialize in its cavernous interior. I am reminded of the mnemonic spaces of Renaissance scholars of rhetoric¹ suffused with erudite fragments and stories, or Bachelard's oneric house of dream memory².

The rooms of the archive are dimly lit, seductive in their shadowed possibility. Tones are muted. At times a faint red glow is reminiscent of the inherent magic of the darkroom, images emerging from the depths of mysterious chemical baths. In the space of this archive images materialize too, further enhancing the analogy. The rooms are literally strung about with photographs. In the gloom and shadow the effect is of 'moments' hanging in space (in a rather fanciful leap I imagine vast repositories, both personal and private, suspended motionless in cyberspace). Our protagonist literally has to push his way through them as he tours the collection. "Click", "click", "click" whispers the fey, red haired assistant as she trails behind him.

Close your eyes and imagine the various sounds a camera makes as you press the shutter button (I know, I know, many digital cameras are silent but humour me) – the whir, the click, the snap, the ker-KLUNK. Imagine the number of people who might be taking a photograph at this instant, how many in a street, in a town, a city. Imagine the absolute cacophony of whirs and clicks as fragments of time are seized and isolated all over the world. All those photographs. All those moments. Spewed into the ether, collected, poured over, stored, framed, discarded, boxed.

Photographs permeate our life. The compulsion to record is fierce. According to Susan Sontag almost everything has been photographed since the cameras invention in 1839.³ Is photographing an event analogous to experiencing it? With the advent of ever more innovative and easy to operate cameras, recording an incident is almost automatic – as easy as breathing. Monumental, beautiful, objective, emotional, horrific, tender, brutal, perverse, whimsical – the moments are recorded at a terrifying pace. No ritual is complete without its photographic memento. Did an event really take place if there is no photograph? We use them as proof, as memories, as weapons, to take inventories, as records, as trophies, to explore, to scrutinize, to express,

to communicate, to collect experiences. Families use photographs to document and construct shared experience. Not photographing one's children or capturing those special occasions is synonymous with disregard. The act of photographing can offer a sense of purpose in a new situation, and whether new or not it can always provide a means of control. To view the world through the lens of a camera is simultaneously a way of distancing oneself and making connections through seeing things differently.

What happens to all these photographs? The compulsion to classify and assemble seems as strong as the compulsion to record. Sontag observes that photographs seem to invite this pursuit.⁴ Easily stored and portable, whether as physical objects or amorphous digital pixels, they lend themselves to the notion and activity of the archive. Why? Roland Barthes states that the photograph itself is invisible; it is as if a person gazing at a photo looks through the image to the actual object.⁵ He describes an almost primordial connection between the person, object or place photographed (the referent) and the viewer. A connection concentrated and maintained by the action of light. The photograph literally becomes an emanation of the referent.⁶ It is a trace, revealed by the action of light, of the thing itself. The two are

inexorably entwined and this allows us to believe that for a single moment, posed in front of a camera, the referent existed. Combine this magic with the allure of possessing a miniature slice of the real, so small, so efficiently packaged. The camera is an archive machine par excellence.

The poignant unremarked story of Poliakov's collection is that these images were all 'somebody's moments' at some point. There is an inherent sadness, intensified by time, in gazing at collections of photographs – all those fragments torn out of context, frozen, stilled. This seems to be the case even if the reason for taking them was quite utilitarian. The desire is to linger, as the inhabitants of this archive did; to pour over detail, to enlarge, to attempt to gaze beyond the surface. This intense fascination occurs in part because of the photographs relationship to a very real past time but also because each image augurs something beyond itself. "There are all sorts of thing here. All kinds of pictures with incredible stories attached" states the manager of the collection, Marilyn Truman.⁷

Photographs have a distinctly resonant quality. Evocative, irresolute – they invite us to fill them out. The space that is opened up is the space of dreams. Synapses tingle, associations travel between images at lightning speed.

Suddenly all sorts of possibilities and connections occur and this breathes life into the collection. This is what brought Poliakoff's, frozen fragments, his archive, to life and ultimately saved it.

"You know what's wonderful about looking at these pictures," says Oswald Bates, the eccentric second in charge. "You have a chance to dream. Dream from looking at these pictures, and then let the mind float, and make connections between things."⁸ Like memories, these photographic fragments nudge each other, collide or combine to form something else. We associate, we evoke, we weave a story. We bring the archive to life.

Dr Ruth Frost is an artist and a Lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art.

¹Yates, Frances Amelia. *The Art of Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996

²Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, (1958)

³Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977, p 3

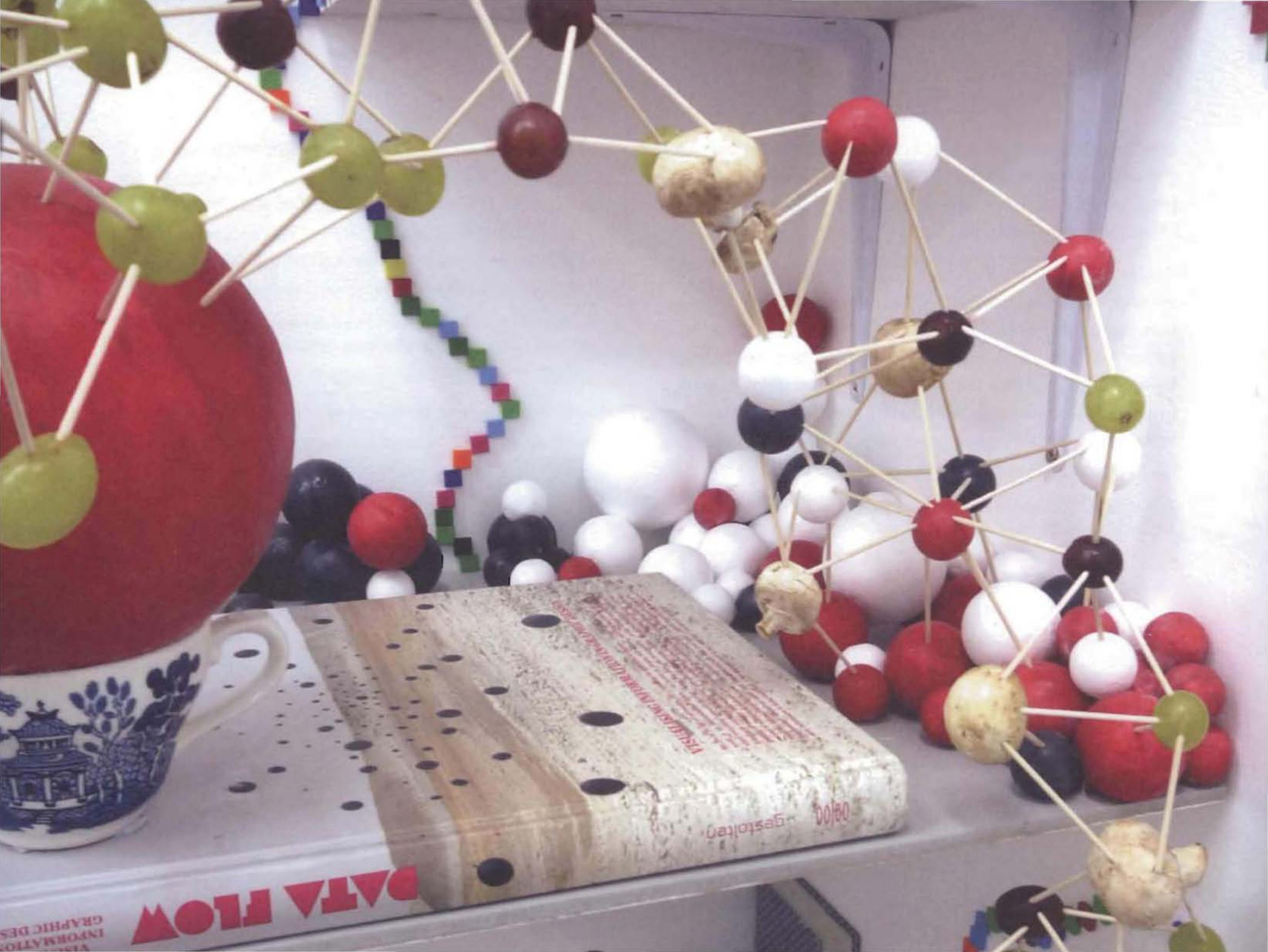
⁴Ibid, p 4

⁵Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984, (Editions du Seuil, 1980) p 6

⁶Ibid, p 80

⁷Poliakoff, Stephen. *Shooting the Past*. London: Talk Back Productions, BBC2, 1999

⁸Ibid.



Check my flow/Study 65, 2011

Mixed media; dimensions variable

The work presented has been created through a somewhat organic process. The various sections, which in the installation interconnect and embed themselves within another, started as an almost incremental build up. Some were more consciously controlled (and structured) while others appeared in a more contingent manner. The overall process of creating the visual elements that constitute the installation was as much about exclusion as well as inclusion. Many of the structures and forms that were part of the initial creative production have been dismissed, pushed to the side to allow for a more reductive language/repetition/code/archive to appear. The installation extends an interest in creating interacting dynamics and codes which become their own source of reference and orientation but which create a dialogue between the encoding aspects of our scientific and technological world.

Work in progress, detail, 2011



Circe's new equipment, 2011

Networked installation; runtime continuous

Before the 2010 earthquake, I spent some time in the Grand Rue slum of Port-au-Prince, Haiti with Atis Resistanz, a community of artists who combine Vodou (the Haitian Creole spelling of the term) and sculpture in their artwork, which is made from paraphernalia and trash. Re-purposing defunct devices discarded from the first world where industry is in decline, Haitian makers seemed to me the final repository of the marvelous, the last possessors of the wand of the Greek goddess Circe.

Divination odds and ends, talismanic gadgets, bottles of oil, sequins, wands, charms, items that are disposed to healing, auguries, tokens for predictions, occult gizmo's, bits and bobs, lace, teapots, petals, leaves, crystals, incense, jars of herbs, lights, dolls, herbs, amulets, spells; equipment to bring you great personal wealth, dances & games of chance. All this is paraphernalia that when combined produces a transgressive power, giving collected objects a renewed meaning and purpose, extending on the one that was originally intended.

I piece together odd things to perpetrate their mystery, but simultaneously pay homage to the subjugated histories and the imperfect notions of human fragility that such an apparent mutant taxonomy encompasses.

Circe's New Equipment explores the interrelationship between Vodou paraphernalia and unrelenting cultural concerns both embodying and critically resisting the dynamics of authoritarian structures.



In the cabinet of Dr Moreau... 2011

Digital prints and mixed media; 290 x 200cm

I am a first generation Australian of German/Serbian parents and my practice engages with ideas and issues surrounding cross-cultural identity. The desire to create fictional narratives and spaces is a response to collected stories of a homeland, never witnessed, and based, instead, on memory, myth and fact.

The synthesis of fact and fiction play a pivotal role in my practice, content that is informed and inspired by the aesthetics and visual language developed by 18th and 19th century engravers and naturalist artists. The fictitious flora and fauna are constructed through a combination of digital and traditional print technologies. Reference to engravings and woodcuts stems from interest in the role of these early prints played in disseminating visual information through compendiums and encyclopaedias. They were the primary evidence of new terrain explored and this evidence was regarded as factual. Secondly, they imply a narrative, and due to their linear structure, enable seamless continuity in the juxtaposition of a range of disparate and diverse original sources.

By coalescing the inherent properties of traditional print and contemporary digital media I have developed a hybrid practice. This 'hybrid' approach to printmaking media synthesizes the form and content within my practice.

18th century French Scenic Wallpapers are the current focus of my research, specifically *Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique*, both conceptually and as a methodology.

Scenic wallpaper provides an intersection between exterior and interior space, an interplay between illusion and reality. It is from this conceptual framework that my recent work draws inspiration, extending the parameters of the print into installation.



Junction: grown into me, 2011

Mixed media installation; single channel video, 6' 36" (looped);
slide show in digital photo frame; dimensions variable

As a child growing up, the camera and movie camera were never far from easy access, permanently available to seize those moments emblematic of family life. They were the celebrations, such as birthday parties and picnics – or just everyday things, like hanging out in the backyard together. The camera was quietly picked up, pictures shot or movies rolled.

I am a first generation Australian of parents who migrated here in the 1950's from a war-ravished Europe. My mother and father were eager to capture countless shared moments partly for their own album but also to send to their family in Holland. It was a way of reassuring my grandmother that her daughter in Australia was okay – and that her young family was thriving.

There was a constant exchange of movies, slides and photographs between Australia and Holland. The visual interchange was one of the key ingredients for maintaining family connections as the imagery gave us a sense of belonging and ancestry. As children, my siblings and I developed a strong bond with kin who only existed in the chromatic descriptions we received regularly in the mail. We had a deep trust that the people in the images were our family. And of course, our notion of extended family was mythologized in our imaginations by pictorial moments of celebration and stability.

Junction: grown into me, video still, 2011



Birds, 2011

Digital print on archival paper; 101 x 118cm

Chamaeleons, 2011

Digital print on archival paper; 60 x 127cm

Insects, 2011

Digital print on archival paper; 106 x 126cm

Whilst working on a project at the Museum of Natural History in Berlin, I became interested in how death and life became interchangeable through the process of museum preparation and exhibition. I was overwhelmed by the number of animals that had been collected and archived since the foundation of the museum in 1810.

Behind the scenes, the world of the museum presented itself to me in absurd combinations of large display cabinets, archival furniture and vast numbers of animals, floor by floor, one species at a time. It seemed an unrealistic and bizarre but orderly world, broken up into mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects. Their display triggered curiosity, melancholy and often discomfort.

By capturing the aura of the museum and particular parts of the collection, I wanted to explore the variety of relationships between presence and absence and the present and the past. The power of silence and stillness made those animals become mediators between the visible and the imaginary, helping to reveal patterns and values about nature, our culture and memory.

Family Photographs and the Archive

by elisabeth redmond

"Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness. It hardly matters what activities are photographed so long as photographs get taken and are cherished. Photography becomes a rite of family life just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and America, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery. As that claustrophobic unit, the

*nuclear family was being carved out of a much larger family aggregate, photography came along to memorialize, to reaffirm symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life. Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family's photograph album is generally about the extended family – and, often is all that remains of it."*¹

In her famously influential book of essays, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag comments on the connection between photography and the family. Photographs are taken at symbolic moments in private domesticity, in which we recognize our familial bonds and social achievements. These are the moments we want to hold onto visually - and with great affection. Usually, the situations we capture are from shared cultural experiences: candles blown out on a birthday cake or opening Christmas presents. Or they are the times that define our rites of passage: a newborn welcomed into the home, a child's first swimming lesson or first ride on a bicycle. The domestic snapshot provides evidence of a mutual history - and represents the family's collective memory.

Photography has been the dominant medium of formal family portraiture in the Western world since its invention. And over that time, the institution of the family has undergone immense changes. Families, today, are not necessarily the stereotypical nuclear entity of another century. And the extended family does not automatically live in close proximity. Despite changes to the family makeup, photographic portraits continue to share the convention of family portraits in painting dating back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. According to writer Julia Hirsch, photographic images of the family "*describe the family as a state whose ties are rooted in property; the family as a spiritual assembly which is based on moral values; and the family as a bond feeling which stems from instinct and passion*"²

Hirsch demonstrates that the genesis of the modern family portrait originated in Renaissance portraiture where families were represented for the first time as an autonomous unit. Early photographers embraced the prevailing rituals of portraiture painting, leading to the preservation of the traditions of family photography that still exists today.³

So, what can be learnt from family depictions of commemorative episodes of familial harmony and stability? Is there a genuine story in those pictures? Or do they merely uphold familial myths and ideologies?

Marianne Hirsch considers Jacques Lacan's ideas on familial representation. When we photograph ourselves in the domestic setting, we are not photographing in a vacuum, we are responding to dominant mythologies of family life, to conceptions we have inherited, and to popular imagery in the media. These images that occupy our subconscious add to the depiction of the conventional familial picture. Moreover, each image is the result of other semblances of family members as they define themselves in relation to the roles they inhabit as father, mother, son, husband or lover. As these different guises intersect, they are filtered through the social conventions which define what and how we might see. What remains absent in the family photograph, we perceive as culturally mundane or taboo. We don't normally see the reverse of the familiar scenarios we have come to expect

in the family photograph such as sorrow or arguments, addiction or sickness. Recently, however, contemporary artists and writers have addressed these sorts of issues in their depictions and examinations of intimate photography.⁴

And yet, it is possible to communicate the undercurrents of specific family relationships in our private photographs. Where are individuals placed in relation to one another in a group photograph? Who is not there? Who has taken the photograph? In retrospect, we comb for visual clues in old photos to provide evidence of their futures: can we see signs on the wedding day of a later divorce? Or something in a child's facial expression that predicts a particular disposition in later adulthood?

Typically, family photographs are shown in sequence. The selection and ordering of images is as relevant as the pictures themselves. The private story is set out in a linear and chronological manner - birth, starting school, graduation, weddings and so on. It is more of an open-ended narrative where the 'chronicle' is never ending. In this process of making, categorizing and displaying a photographic album, the family constructs itself.⁵ Furthermore, this urge to make a photograph, to document an event, to compose statements as unique events, is directly related to the aspiration of making an archive.

Since its invention, photography has lent itself to the rationale of the archive. The 19th century structures and prototypes established for collating data, procuring knowledge and assembling histories found photographs to be a highly adaptable form of documentation. More than that, the ways in which photography has advanced and been deployed as a technology has been largely dominated by archival purposes. Photography is a medium of the precise or actual but it is also a medium of collection, comparison, duplication and dissemination. It has become central to the archives of numerous arenas including the domestic family.⁶

Despite all the investments made in it, the photograph remains, as Allan Sekula observes, a '*fragmentary and incomplete utterance*'.⁷ It actually means little on its own and requires a broader context to bring out its covert possibilities. A photograph is a highly mobile image with the potential to be extracted from its original location, to outlive its initial purpose or to exist in many different locations simultaneously. While a photograph is a fixed image, its meaning is rather fragile. As Sontag observes,

*'...part of the built-in interest of photographs, and a major source of their aesthetic value, is precisely the transformations that time works upon them, the way they escape the intentions of their makers. Given enough time, many photographs do acquire an aura.'*⁸

The function and meaning of photographs change over time. When viewing archival family photographs we find that the memories and stories associated with the image have shifted and changed.

Memories evoked from photographs are generated into a dialogue between the past and present, between the viewer and picture and in conjunction with cultural contexts and historical moments. And in this intersecting arrangement the image itself is a trace or clue of what has been. Family photographs become associated with cultural memory. When we experience our memories in a photograph, a tension is set up between the private moment of memory and the public moment of recall. There is a certain flow between the two actions, an interconnectedness, regardless of whether the significance and recollection of the image changes.⁹

When families take photos of themselves they are making an archive. The older the images become, the more they are valued. The stories in the photographs change as they are retold. And over time, the dynamics of family life are altered: the nuclear family evolves and extended families vanish as relatives disperse. And yet, photographs continue to provide evidence of familial connectedness and the depictions are all the more cherished. The family photograph is a spectator to shared memories of celebration and rites of passage.

Elisabeth Redmond is an MFA candidate at the Tasmanian School of Art.

¹Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books, 1979, p 8

²Hirsch, Julia. *The Family Photographs: Content, Meaning and Effect*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p 15

³Ibid, p 15

⁴Hirsch, Marianne (ed). *Familial Gaze*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999

⁵Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London: Verso, 2002, p 20

⁶Campany, David. *Art and Photography*. London: Phaidon, 2003, p 47

⁷David Campany refers to writings from Allan Sekula's 'Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labor and Capital', in Wallis, Brian (ed), *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987, p 20

⁸Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books, 1979, p140

⁹Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London: Verso, 2002, 14

artist biographies

brook andrew

Brook Andrew is a conceptually driven artist who challenges cultural and historical perception, using installation, text and image to comment on local and global issues regarding race, consumerism and history. Apart from drawing inspiration from public media and found archival collections, Brook travels nationally and internationally to work with communities and museum collections and display to comment and create new work reflecting objects, concepts and local thought.

Brook completed *Jumping Castle War Memorial* for the 2010 Biennale of Sydney: a work that was inspired by his research in museums and theme parks, and the collection from the Musée Des Confluences, Lyon and his exhibition *THEME PARK* at AAMU, Holland. Brook has recently finished a number of commissions, including a portrait of Professor Marcia Langton for the National Portrait

Gallery, Canberra, and a large-scale work, *The Cell*, commissioned by the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney, currently touring Australia and New Zealand. In 2011, Brook embarks on an interactive animation with Imagi Studio's, Hong Kong, and a new work commissioned by Artspace, Sydney which will travel to the exhibition *Burn What You Cannot Steal* at Gallery Nova, Zagreb.

Brook was the recipient of the Australia Council ISCP residency, NYC 2008–09; South Project at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo residency, Santiago 2006, and the Australia Council for the Arts Fellowship, 2001. Publications include *Future Images* 2010, *Theme Park* 2008, *Current: Contemporary Art from Australia and New Zealand* 2008, *Eye to Eye* 2007, and *Hope and Peace* 2005.

For more information see: www.brookandrew.com

gerrard dixon

Gerrard Dixon lives and works in Tasmania. In 1997 he received his Master of Fine Arts from the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania where he is currently working as the Technical Officer in the Photography Studio. Dixon's work has been featured in a number of exhibitions in Tasmania at galleries that include Letitia Street Studio, Dancing Dog Gallery, The Long Gallery and the Plimsoll Gallery. He is continually working on and gathering a collection of historical images and ephemera for future projects.

ross gibson and kate richards

Ross Gibson is a writer, media artist and Professor of Contemporary Arts at Sydney College of the Arts. Recent works include: the books *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* and *The Summer Exercises*, the blog Accident Music, and *Conversations II*, a three-month durational work for the Biennale of Sydney. Much of this work has been inspired by the *Life After Wartime* suite.

Kate Richards is a media artist, producer and Lecturer and Co-ordinator of the Masters of Convergent Media at the University of Western Sydney. Recent artworks include the roller derby/video event *Bloodbath*, the web-based *Wayfarer*, the Second Life *Foul Whisperings*, *Strange Matters* and the video *Travels in Beautiful Desolation*.

Gibson and Richards began collaborating on the multimedia suite *Life After Wartime* in 1999, and together have devised, created and exhibited five multimedia projects drawn from the archive. Although the projects all provide different experiences for their audiences, and use a variety of design techniques and software/hardware, all the projects enable audiences to discover and explore patterns, resonances and multiple narratives through the archive database with its extensive metadata schema and Gibson's evocative texts. *Spirit Patrol*, 2011 is a new work in the *Life After Wartime* suite.

susan hiller

"... Susan Hiller has been a hugely-influential figure for a younger generation of British artists. She uses ephemeral, everyday objects, telling their stories and extracting new meanings from them, producing art which is both visually stimulating and emotionally compelling." (Tate Gallery, 1996)

"... There aren't many artists whose every new work you would want to see and Hiller is one of them." (The Observer, April 5, 2005)

Susan Hiller, born in the USA in 1940, began her artistic career in London in the early 1970s, when she first became known for an innovative artistic practice including group participation works such as *Dream Mapping* (1974); museological/archival installations such as *Fragments* (1978), *Enquiries/Inquiries* (1973 & 1975) and *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972/6); and many other works in a range of media exploring automatic writing, ESP, photomat machines, wallpaper, postcards and other denigrated aspects of popular culture.

The common denominator in all her works is their starting point in a cultural artefact from our own society. Her work is an excavation of the overlooked, ignored, or rejected aspects of our shared cultural production, and her varied projects collectively have been described as investigations into the 'unconscious' of culture.

Hiller cites Minimalism, Fluxus, aspects of Surrealism and her previous study of anthropology as major influences on her work. Hiller served as Distinguished Visiting Professor of Fine Art at California State University, Long Beach in 1988; Visiting Art Council Chair at UCLA, Los Angeles in 1991 and 1992, Professor of Art at University of Ulster, Belfast 1986-91; and Baltic Professor of Fine Art at University of Newcastle, UK 1999-2002.

For more information see: www.susanhiller.org

vid ingelevics

Vid Ingelevics is an artist, writer, and independent curator based in Toronto, Canada. His work has a broad focus on issues related to the representation of the past. His artwork and curatorial projects have been shown in Canada, the US and Europe. His writing on photography and art has appeared in publications in Canada and Europe. He currently holds the position of Associate Professor in the School of Image Arts, Ryerson University, Toronto, teaching in two graduate programs, Documentary Media as well as Photo Preservation and Collections Management.

Currently he is working on the multi-year project, titled *Freedom Rocks*, of which the video, *Souvenir*, is a part. This project is being undertaken in collaboration with Canadian photographer and Ryerson colleague Blake Fitzpatrick. The project, utilizing still photography and video, explores questions related to the movement of both large and small pieces of the former Berlin Wall from Berlin to North America after 1989. Excerpts from this work-in-progress were shown in Berlin in 2009 during the 20th anniversary celebrations in that city.

jacob leary

Jacob Leary is a Hobart based artist. He graduated with Honours from the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania in 2008 and is currently completing a Masters by Research degree at the same institution. Jacob's practise spans painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking and video. He utilises invented visual and information systems which are extended through each medium. Leary's work explores various non-linear dynamics at play in the construction of entities and how we relate to 'things'. His practice often makes reference to technology and knowledge, progress and catastrophe and the place of human beings within these forces. Jacob is represented by Despard Gallery, Hobart and is currently a sessional staff member at the Tasmanian School of Art. He is also an active member of the Hobart A.R.I In-flight Gallery.

nancy mauro-flude

Nancy Mauro-Flude graduated in 2000 from Sydney University, with a Bachelor of Arts (Performance Studies) 1:1 Honours. She then studied at the Institute for Somatic Movement Studies, Amsterdam (2000-02) and received a Master Fine Arts in Media Design from Piet Zwart Institute, Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam (2007).

Crusading various locations, Mauro-Flude mostly lived for 9 years in Amsterdam where she was artist-in-residence at Das Arts: advanced institute for performing art, Amsterdam School of the Arts, 2001-04, where her mentors included Fiona Tan and Nan Hoover. She was honorary researcher at the Slade School of Fine Art, UK, and artist-in-residence at SUBOTRON, Electric Avenue, Museum Quartier, Vienna from 2007-08.

In a speculative and ritualistic manner her work points to computer hacker culture and the current renaissance of theatre machines and automata. She conducts extensive research into networked media and custom-built interfaces. Mauro-Flude instigates projects that engage creatively with free-software movement and maintains an active practice in challenging the relationship of embodiment with the electronic medium in light of the fluid infrastructures of the 21C.

Working on an international circuit her work has been exhibited at: CAST, Transmediale, V2, Institute for the Unstable Media, Waag Society/for New & Old Media, Netherlands New Media Art Institute, TMAG, Criticalpath, Museum Quartier Vienna, FILE festival, Galeria Vermelho, Sao Paulo, International Season for Electronic Arts [ISEA].

milan milojevic

Milan Milojevic is currently Head of the Printmaking Studio and Postgraduate Coursework Program Coordinator at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and has held regular solo exhibitions over the past two decades and contributed to group exhibitions throughout Australia, USA, UK, Europe and Asia including most recently: 2011 *Islandia*, Colville Gallery, Hobart, Tas; 2009 *From the Cabinet of Dr Moreau...*, James Makin Gallery, Melbourne, Vic; *Stories of our Making: Contemporary Australian Printmaking*, University Gallery, UWE, Bristol, UK. In 2009 Milan won the Hutchins Art Prize. He has received grants from major national funding bodies including the Australia Council, Australian Research Council, and in 1986 was awarded a D.A.A.D Post-graduate Research Grant, at the Hochschule fur Bildende Kunst Hamburg, Germany.

Milan's work is held in major public and private collections in Australia and Europe, including: Art Bank; National Gallery of Victoria; Art Gallery of South Australia; National Gallery of Australia; Art Gallery of NSW; BHP Bilton, Vic; Queensland Art Gallery; Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery; Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery; Parliament House, Canberra; Fremantle City Council, WA; Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions, Lodz, Poland.

elisabeth redmond

Elisabeth Redmond lives and works in Tasmania. She is an MFA Research candidate at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania. Redmond's research explores the impact of cross cultural influences on family relations. Archival imagery, photography and video are her mediums for artistic enquiry.

Redmond's work has been featured in a number of exhibitions in Tasmania. They include the Fine Art Gallery, Entrepot, Long Gallery and the Plimsoll Gallery. Her photographs are in private collections in Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Washington, USA.

claudia terstappen

Claudia Terstappen studied art at the Art Akademie Düsseldorf in Germany. She lived and worked in Düsseldorf, London, Barcelona and New York before moving to Melbourne in 2004. Her resumé includes more than 60 solo and 100 group exhibitions worldwide.

Terstappen's work focuses on the way science, religion and myth explain the world around us, challenging strict divisions between reason and imagination, faith and superstition, civilisation and savagery. Through lens-based media she inquires as to what shapes our knowledge and belief, thus compelling a richer and broader imagination of cultural patterns, processes and emotions.

Her video and photography works often apply hybrid still and moving images to suggest alternative ways of experiencing time and place.

Her work is held in collections in Australia, Japan, Spain, Germany, France and the US.

Claudia Terstappen is Professor and Head of Fine Arts at Monash University. In November 2011 Museum DKM, Duisburg, Germany will hold a major retrospective of her work.

Acknowledgements

an archival impulse

28 May – 24 June 2011

Plimsoll Gallery, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania

Centre for the Arts, Hunter Street, Hobart, Tasmania

www.utas.edu.au/plimsoll

Public Art Forum

27 May, Dechaineaux Lecture Theatre, Tasmanian School of Art

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